Anne-Marie Flathers

ANTH 206

7/31/10

**Ethnography and Ethnology: The Way of the Gamer**

**I. Introduction**

We have all witnessed the classification of individuals into certain groups; a phenomena particularly common with teenagers. These groups range from “prep” to “nerd” to “jock”, and exist in a more sophisticated form in the adult world. However, I chose to step into the High School world and examine a particularly fascinating group, the gamers.

The common stereotypical idea of a gamer is usually a boy between 12 and 25 that spends an unhealthy portion of their time playing video games. They appear to have no priorities in life besides video games. They eat and sleep as long as it does not interfere with their video game playing. I wanted to find out if these conceptions were valid.

The goal of my study, as stated above, was to prove or disprove the common theories about gamers. Once I could discover the truth about this group of individuals, I could theorize about the reasons behind their behavior. Finally, as with any anthropological study, I sought to find some grander truth about the entirety of the human population.

This ethnography will consist of the answers to the questions above: what is the real way of life of the gamer (are our preconceived ideas valid), why do gamers behave the way they do, what does this tell us about humans in general? The study will be presented as an introduction, a methodology section, the data collected, a cross-cultural comparison, and a conclusion. My questions will be answered throughout.

**II. Methodology**

To my convenience, this study was to be no difficulty because I know of plenty gamers. There is a group of three people who are commonly classified by others as a part of the gamer group. They all live in the same basement and spend quite a bit of time doing common gamer activities. So, naturally, I chose these three to be the object of my study: Andrew, Jimbo, and Daniel.

It was a simple study. I asked permission to come observe them doing what they do for an hour or two. It ended up being two. I entered the basement with a pad of paper and a pen and watched quietly as they went about their normal business. It was my objective to be as objective as possible.

However, I knew that complete objectivity would be impossible to achieve. But this was my goal: I said only a handful of words the whole time. I gave no facial expressions that might change their behavior. I did what I could to limit my pre-formed ideas about gamers. I knew that I had to enter their world without my previous knowledge to understand the true existence of their world. After observing this group of gamers in their natural environment, I went on to ask them a few questions.

**III. Data Presentation & Analysis**

To be perfectly honest, there is not a lot of variation between their activities. It seems as though they eat, sleep, talk, but mostly play video games. While observing these three young men, I found three areas of particular interest to me. The first is their eating habits and how this relates to their gaming activities. They always chose the most convenient food to eat. It was either something quick to make or something that was made by someone else, namely Andrew’s mom. What I found out is that, although it may appear originally to be a matter of laziness, it is really that their eating habits must fit in with their first priority: gaming. Because they choose to focus their energy on playing video games, they tend to avoid meals that subtract time from their video games.

Another phenomenon I found particularly intriguing is the way they interact with other people. This includes the interactions between the three (Andrew, Jimbo, and Daniel), between one of the group and others in the household, and between one playing a game and another somewhere else on the planet via a headset. It seemed that something was true of all three of these types of interactions: they tend to make light of any conversation topic. The way they communicate comes across as if they are always joking and poking fun at others. The only party that ever attempts a serious conversation is someone else in the household. These conversations are held, but the gamer communicates in a very light and joking way. It’s as if they have another language. What I realized is that they are not avoiding serious conversations, but simply carry them on in a different way than others would.

The final observation that I would like to consider here is the way they choose to spend their time, a topic we have already addressed to some degree. Their main focus is always video games. It seems as though every other aspect of their life revolves around this. If something does not fit in with their gamer lifestyle, it is cut out or avoided. Because of this, they tend to have either part-time jobs or no job at all. This information comes from the interview I conducted afterwards. I asked if they intended on getting a job or going to school. They said that they would, but that they are not used to spending a lot of time working or going to school. They each, of course, joked about the situation, seeming to not take the subject seriously. But after the conclusion I made earlier, that their idea of a serious conversation is thrashing though it jokingly, I realized they do take the subject seriously.

The low priority they give to work and school causes tension between the gamer and others because of the larger culture’s expectations. Andrew is the only one of this group whose parents live in the household. The others rent rooms either for free or a very low price. I observed the interactions between Andrew and his parents and they seemed to be disappointed in the way he spent his time. The gamers know that their way of life is not sustainable in the society they live in. But to them it seems the thought of living another way is frightening.

**IV. Cross-Cultural Comparison**

**V. Conclusion**

Let’s recap my three original questions. They are as follows: Is the stereotypical idea of a gamer correct? Why do gamers behave the way they do? What can this tell us about humans in general? To be quite honest, it seems as though the commonly accepted idea of gamers is fairly accurate. They do spend a large portion of their time playing video games. They do tend to put video games higher in priority than everything else in life. The ones I studied fit the physical description: a male between 12 and 25. It is important to note, however, that the study I conducted is obviously not exhaustive of all gamers that exist.

The answer to my second question is twofold. As we have noted, the most influential factor on the behavior of the gamer is that they put video games before other activities. Another factor that influences the way they behave is something that is learned in the gamer subculture. They have specific words and phrases and ways of communication that are unique to gamers. They become gamers by choice and by being inadvertently taught.

Thirdly, I will seek to find a truth about humans in general from my observations. This is the point I would like to make here: there is no natural human need to work and go to school. These become mandatory for anyone living in a society such as that of America. People can’t survive without food and water, so they must work, and they must go to school in turn. However, if a society existed where these things were not necessary, a human could live quite comfortably without working. The only implication this has is that one person will have to work more to support this work-less lifestyle. So although working is not necessary for all human beings, it is required of at least a few for a group to survive.

I think it has become quite clear that the way of life of a gamer is not sustainable in this society. I would like to return to Andrew, Jimbo, and Daniel in ten years or so to see what happened. This would teach us a lot about the gamer culture: how they respond to their way of life being threatened, as I am predicting will happen. I would liked to have been able to observe these three in a different situation, as I know they don’t spend all of their time in their basement. More questions I have are: Does the gamer means of communication extend to all conversations (or do they change in order to interact with foreigners)? What types of situations compromise the observations I have made about their way of life (what will they sacrifice gaming time for)? I also think that there is a lot more studying to do as on how their subculture fits in with the larger culture.